

# California's wildfires caused uptick in skin ailments, says researcher

March 20 2023, by Cara Murez

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Wildfires are known to have a lot of negative impacts on the

environment and the health of the people who live through them.

Yet another is the worsening of [skin](#) conditions, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). The group shared strategies to minimize the effect air pollution can have on people's skin during its [annual meeting](#), held this past weekend in New Orleans.

"The health impact of air pollution from wildfires has not been well studied, but the evidence from our recent studies suggests that short-term exposure to [wildfire](#) air pollution can affect the skin and cause flares of certain skin disorders," said Dr. Maria Wei, a professor of dermatology at the University of California, San Francisco.

"We found that the air pollution from California wildfires were associated with an increase in patient visits to dermatologists for both eczema and psoriasis," Wei added in an AAD news release. "These results are consistent with studies indicating that air pollution from wildfires can be more toxic than air pollution caused by traditional industrial and traffic sources."

Psoriasis happens when the body makes skin cells too quickly, causing them to pile up and form patches on the skin. Eczema is inflamed, itchy, irritated skin.

People with the skin condition eczema were more likely to visit dermatologists during the wildfires. Those with psoriasis were more likely to seek care five to nine weeks after the fires started, Wei said.

"This difference in timing may suggest that there are differences in how air pollution triggers flares for eczema compared to psoriasis," Wei explained. "We also noted a significant increase in the number of oral and injectable medications prescribed for eczema during the wildfires, suggesting that the disease flares were more serious."

Adults and children experienced different impacts from wildfires. Pediatric psoriasis patients seeking treatment did not increase during the fires, while [adult patients](#) did.

However, there was an increase in the number of children and adults over age 65 who sought treatment for eczema. The researchers noted that people who had never been diagnosed with eczema sought care from dermatologists for itchy skin during the wildfires.

"One of the interesting things that we discovered is that wildfire air pollution can affect communities quite a distance from where the fires originate," Wei said. "The two fires we studied were 50 miles and 175 miles away from San Francisco, where the studies' patient population was located. This suggests that as [wildfires](#) increase, we might see an influx in the number of people seeking care for pollution-related skin conditions."

No studies have confirmed how to minimize the effects of wildfire [air pollution](#) on skin conditions like [psoriasis](#) and [eczema](#), Wei noted.

"We hypothesize that staying indoors during days with high levels of air pollutants and having an indoor air purifier can help," she said. "It's not clear if topical medications or moisturizers will help. Future studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of these strategies."

Research presented at meetings should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

**More information:** The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [eczema](#).

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